

# Truman Capote, Writer of Style and Clarity, Dies

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Truman Capote in a recent photograph

Nancy Chagnon

## Truman Capote Is Dead at 59; Novelist of Style and Clarity

By ALBIN KREBS

Truman Capote, one of the postwar American novelists, died yesterday in Los Angeles, surrounded by family and friends. He was 59 years old.

Mr. Capote died at the home of his friend, the actress Faye Dunaway, in the Bel-Air section of the Los Angeles Police Department. "There is no indication of foul play," he said, adding that the county coroner's office would investigate the cause of death.

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view," asked himself whether, at that point in his life, God had helped him. His answer: "Yes. More and more. But I'm a drug addict. I'm an alcoholic. I'm a genius. Of course, I could be all four of these dubious things and still be a saint." Truman, Strockfus, Persons and others, who had known him since he was 30, 1924, he was the son of Archibald and Lillian Capote, a member of an old Alabama family and the former Lillie Mae Faulk of Monroeville, Ala. Years later he adopted the surname of his stepfather, Joe Capote, a Cuban-born New York businessman.

Mr. Capote's mother, who eventually committed suicide, liked to be called "Mother." He was as close to her as a son, and she was as close to him as a mother. Living with her husband in a New Orleans house, he was in Monroeville when he was barely able to walk, and for the first nine years of his life he lived in the shadow of his mother's nervousism and of his father's quiet, unassuming, and unassuming.

### A Spiritual Orphan

In that period, he said years later, he felt like "a spiritual orphan, like a turtle on its back." He said, "It was so different from everyone, so much more intelligent and sensitive and perceptive. I was having fifty perceptions a minute to everyone else's five. I always felt like I was going to understand what I felt about things. I guess that's why I said, 'I'm a genius.'"

Most summers the boy returned to New Orleans for a month or so, and accompanied his father on trips up and down the Mississippi. He was a voracious reader, and he was a voracious reader. Truman learned to tap dance, he said, and was proud of the fact that he could dance. He was a voracious reader, and he was a voracious reader.

Many of his stories, notably "A Christmas Memory," which paid homage to Faulk, who succeeded him in his childhood loneliness, were based on his recollections of life in and around Monroeville. His first novel, "Other Voices, Other Rooms," was published in 1948.

Character in "Mockingbird" The young Truman's best friend in Monroeville was a girl named Noodle Harper. Lee, who many years later put him into her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, "To Kill a Mockingbird," was the daughter of the president of the town's board of education.

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Works he wrote in a long career

- A partial list of books by Truman Capote: "Other Voices, Other Rooms"—1948; "Breakfast at Tiffany's"—1958; "Local Color"—1950; "The Grass Harp"—1953; "The Muses Are Heard"—1956; "Breakfast at Tiffany's"—1958; "Selected Writings"—1963; "A Christmas Memory"—1965; "House of Flowers"—1966; "Thanksgiving Visitor"—1969; "Trilogy: An Experiment of Multimedia"—1971; "The Dogs Bark: Private Places and Public People"—1973; "Miram"—1982; "One Christmas"—1983.

I believe I should have a type of a record of Capote reading 'a Christmas Memory' list from the Daily News.

I do want to have a Christmas tree here at Eskdale this year, a very large one in the center of the hall.

York, but he disliked schools and did poorly in his courses, including English, although he had taught himself to read and write when he was 5 years old. Having been told by many teachers that the precocious child was probably mentally backward, the Capotes sent him to a psychiatrist who, Truman Capote said triumphantly some years later, "naturally classified me as a genius."



Truman Capote at work on his novel "Answered Prayers" in 1971 and, left, in a photo made in the 1950's. In 1955, he was photographed while dancing with Marilyn Monroe at a New York night club. In 1976, he appeared in a cameo role in the movie, "Murder by Death."

### First Stories and Novel

In a two-year stay at The New Yorker, Mr. Capote had several short stories published in minor magazines. "Several of them were submitted to my employers, and none accepted," he wrote later. In the same period, he wrote his first, never-published novel, "Summer Crossing."



The novel, a sensitively written account of a teen-age boy's coming to grips with maturity and accepting his world as it is, achieved wide popularity and critical acclaim and was hailed as a remarkable achievement for a writer only 23 years old.

The result of Mr. Capote's discovery was "In Cold Blood," which was almost universally praised. John Hersey called it "a remarkable book," for example, but there were dissenters. Stanley Kauffmann, in The New Republic, sniped at "In Cold Blood," saying "this isn't writing, it's research."

Mr. Capote was co-author of the movie "Beat the Devil" with John Huston and wrote the screenplay for a film of Henry James's "The Innocents." Mr. Capote turned his second novel, "The Grass Harp," into an unsuccessful Broadway play and, with Harold Arlen, wrote the 1954 musical, also unsuccessful, "House of Flowers." Mr. Capote also adapted a number of his stories, including "A Christmas Memory" and "The Thanksgiving Visitor," for television.

immediately write down everything he had been told.

Critics noted his deft handling of children as characters in his work, his ability to move from the real to the surreal, and his use of lush words and images. In 1983, the critic Mark Schorer wrote of Mr. Capote: "Perhaps the single constant in his prose is style, and the emphasis he himself places upon the importance of style."

In the pursuit of literary celebrity in succeeding years, the writer was photographed in his homes in the Hamptons on Long Island, in Switzerland and at United Nations Plaza. He was a voracious reader, and he was a voracious reader.

For many of the postwar years Mr. Capote traveled widely and lived abroad much of the time with Jack Dunphy, his companion of more than a quarter-century. He turned out short-story collections and nonfiction for Vogue, Mademoiselle, Esquire and The New Yorker, which first published "The Muses Are Heard," a 1956 book chronicling a tour of the Soviet Union by a company of black Americans in "Porgy and Bess."

"I conceived the whole adventure as a short comic 'nonfiction novel,' the first," Mr. Capote said. "That book was an important event for me. While writing it, I realized I just might have found a solution to what had always been my greatest creative quandary. I wanted to produce a journalistic novel, something on a large scale that would have the credibility of fact, the immediacy of film, the depth and freedom of prose, and the precision of poetry."